



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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National Latino Congreso Backs Ridley-Thomas' Call for U.S. Dept. of Justice Probe of Los Angeles County Probation Department and Office of Education

The nation's leading Latino advocacy groups are calling for the U.S. Dept. of Justice to investigate Los Angeles County's youth probation system for potential civil rights violations caused by the alleged mistreatment of juveniles in custody.

The National Latino Congreso, representing more than 260 Latino organizations from more than 20 states, passed the resolution calling for a federal investigation of the Los Angeles County Probation Dept. and the Los Angeles County Office of Education Saturday at its annual meeting in Austin, Texas.

Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas attended the Congreso as a delegate and introduced the resolution, which calls for both the U.S. Dept. of Justice and the U.S. Dept. of Education to investigate the County departments.

"Los Angeles County has more youths behind bars than any jurisdiction in the world," Ridley-Thomas said. "The overwhelming majority of those youths are Latino and African

American, and the overwhelming response from experts who have visited our County detention facilities is conditions in our camps are frightening.

“The Probation Dept. can not solve this crisis alone. The depth of the problem requires the federal government,” Ridley-Thomas said.

In L.A. County, the number of Latino and African American youths on probation is more than double the number enrolled at UCLA and USC combined, Ridley-Thomas noted. Without federal intervention, 21,000 youths are trapped in a probation-to-prison pipeline that threatens to resurrect an apartheid-like state within California.

“What Mark Ridley-Thomas has reported about the probation system corroborates what many parents have told me,” said Angela Sanbrano, President, National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities. Sanbrano said parents of youths in probation camps have told her their children witness abuses by staff but are afraid to speak out for fear of retaliation.

For more than a year there have been reports of severe problems in the probation system, she added, but “nothing has happened. That’s why we have issued an urgent call to the Justice Department and the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Education to look into this.”

The Supervisor, whose district’s population is majority Latino and African American, said the resolution is an example of how Latinos and African Americans must unite to address a critical challenge: “The very future of the United States as a democratic example to the world rests on whether we prevail in saving a generation of endangered Latino and African American youths – it is the nation’s crisis, but our communities can lead the way to a solution,” Ridley-Thomas said.

Antonio Gonzalez, president of the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project, cited “the disproportionate impact on Latino and African American youths,” as a key reason for the Dept. of Justice to investigate potential civil rights violations in the probation system. “Los Angeles County has the largest Latino population of any county. We deserve better.”

The L.A. County Probation Department currently has 6,000 employees and a \$700 million annual budget. Supervisor Ridley-Thomas’ concerns are based on reports that problems at the Probation Department extend far beyond the confines of its remote youth camps. County auditors and the Department’s own investigations found evidence of serious wrongdoing by managers and probation officers throughout the Department.

In addition to his call for a federal investigation, the Supervisor has hosted public events to engage parents, educators, and community stakeholders in detailed and candid discussion about the challenges facing the Probation Department.

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